

# In Search of a www.analogfeminism.net: Starting with Three Contrarian Concepts via Mother-Daughter Machines to Come

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analogue, *n.* and *adj.*

**Forms:** 18- **analog** (chiefly *U.S.*), 18- **analogue**.

**Etymology:** < French *analogue* thing that has characteristics in common with another thing (1787), person who resembles another (mid 19th cent.) and its etymon ancient Greek ἀνάλογον *analogon* *n.*

Compare earlier *analogate n.*, *analagon n*

In sense B. 1a arising from the use of some sort of analogy or analogue in the calculating device

(compare e.g. *quots. 1941<sup>2</sup> 1960* for *analog computer n.* at Special uses).

In sense B. 1e arising from the representation of the original signal by an analogously varying physical quantity.

In technical uses as adjective normally opposed to uses of digital *adj.*

(OED)

digital, *n.* and *adj.*

**Forms:** 1ME **digitalle**, 1ME 16- **digital**.

**Etymology:** < classical Latin *digitālis* measuring a finger's breadth, in post-classical Latin also of or relating to the finger (8th cent. in a British source) (OED)

Looking sideways,  
our analog feminist looks distracted,  
yet read on; start by focusing on her.



Fig. 1. Untitled Film Still #53, 1980, Cindy Sherman, © Tate Britain

## 1. Analog feminism is the flip – not the opposite – side of digital feminism.

Analog feminism (AF) and digital feminism (DF) are two sides of the same coin; or, multiple twin sisters joined at the hip. Whatever the case, we, or at least one of us, are here to focus on and fly with what's left uncoordinated in-and connecting—all that's (to be) digit-alled in the evolving idioms of feminist discourses. We care to see, or at least to try to attend to, that which persists, that which demands, in each case, our attention as the messier, elastic, micro-organismic dimension of feminist spirit that remains figuratively and materially tied to—while seemingly slipping from—the extensively discrete unit, however tiny, frame, segment, sequence, grip, control, of all sorts such as categories, paradigms, algorithms, loops, logics, languages, laws, histories, geopolitical borders, discursive boundaries, representational devices, event-generating regulatory apparatuses as (seen on) TV, etc.—you name it, you know it when you cross it. Ready to evaporate at any moment, like that grin of the Cheshire Cat's, AF is shuttling between zeros and (minus/plus) ones at this very moment, wildly and widely:

In terms of the pragmatic roles they play, the zeros and ones of machine code do far more than hark back to the binaries their logical symbols represent. If zero is supposed to signify a hole, a space, or a missing piece, and one is the sign of positivity, digital machines turn these binaries around. In both electronic systems and the punched cards of weaving machines, a hole is one, and a blank is zero, in which case there are two missing elements, if missing is where either can be said to go. [1]

True, at least at this stage in ongoing techno-revolutions that constantly update and reprogram the pulses and streams of the world, what is inevitably lacking in digital machines, mini- or mega-, that could recognize both yes and no, whichever way your finger might "go," but can only register yes or no, just one at a time, seems just that: what they don't have—or perhaps won't?—is a diagonal capacity to "go" out of sequence, to go gray between zeroes and ones, which is where life is lodged, where breathing happens, multi-directionally, each time anew. No matter how you feel, now, inseparably tied to or already tired of that Siri-woman-thingy on that once "new" iPhone 4S, it is after all your "command," however mistaken, that the she-machine is "following," again, however mistakenly; in this increasingly touchy simulation of dual control or zero-ing-in that goes really virtual, she is, when on, waiting for you to say something, regardless of whatever unprintable "shit" [2] she might have to say "in response."

If and when, turning around a corner, I "am no more than an episodic voice, a speech without contour" [3], as Maurice Blanchot quips while musing "On a Change of Epoch," such a stabilizing neutrality of the narrative "I" is not without its ontological vibrancy, revolutionary deviancy even, which can only be dormant rather than straightforwardly absent; any transitory e-motions could vibrate thusly, derivatively. Am I the only one who senses a certain imperative here? I suggest we read this malleable, wayward "episodic voice" in us, inaugurally. With no particular vision to pursue or agenda to push, I still see a certain contrarian allegory of digital cuts at work, bubbling up; how the guillotine accentuates a sense of life; how pruning keeps trees growing; how the last turns into the first, etc. Yielding to the guiding and disorienting forces of fragments, those zillion unshapely or even over-processed "bits and pieces" that infrastructure the "digital" turn, could be liberating no matter what, even and especially for those self-knowing souls seeking to write themselves into a world which they would also have to destroy masterfully.

A moral of the story? Keep connecting, following, and undoing whatever dots that may appear on the horizon, without losing a thread that may remain blurry at any point. Just as the world writes itself out via a series of displaced 'Is,' as noted by Jacques Derrida, AF is (to be) found or locatable, however elusively, in what's "saved and lost at once" in DF:

When one writes, one is always trying to outsmart the worst. Perhaps so as to prevent it from taking everything away, but the last word, you know, always belongs to non-mastery, for both the reader and oneself. And it's good that this is the way it is. The living desire to write keeps you in relation to a terror that you try to maneuver with even as you leave it intact, audible in that place [...]. [4]

So, what am I—or what is Siri, if still here—trying to say? AF, as those countless, unfurling, bleeding archives of feminism on the move, is what (test-)drives [5] DF-crazy?

This cannot be a manifesto [6]. Having nothing to show, AF cannot be something (more definite or programmatic) like a counter-manifesto, either, a "manifesto for a 'return to "old-style feminist politics,'" [7] for instance, the sort of politics that deals with "real" problems such as those still found in "India" where, as Professor Martha Nussbaum reports, "academic feminists have thrown themselves into practical struggles." [8] However, as practical struggles are really, indeed, ubiquitous and becoming ever so infinitesimally global across spacetime, from a boardroom in New York City today or the bedroom of Penelope in Ithaca in ancient Greece, any acts of thinking through geneses, structures and patterns of such injustices, malpractices, and errors would be part of such struggles.

So again, nothing new in itself, not even old-fashioned or scholastic, AF functions quite simply as a sort of mobile tag, an "umbrella" term, for feminist repositories of recyclable ideas or resources for renewable feminist energy. As such, AF, both in itself and for itself, remains old and "dirty," as originally disordered and disidentitarian as "humus," the earth from which humanity sprouts;:

There are holy grounds; the earth rejoices; Adam is of *adamah*, humanity from "humus." [...] What is intriguing is that "radical disorder is the key to the functions of humus." At "the molecular level, it may indeed be the most disordered material on Earth," exhibiting fractal self-similarity with no self-sameness. [9]

Not only that, we should add, AF is as (extra-)ordinary as an apple pie, just as that housewifery figure photographed in "apparently solitary, unguarded moments of reflection [...]" or in conversation with somebody off-set and outside of the frame" [10]. A Betty Friedan might come into view here, still with "the problem that has no name" [11]. AF is then, let's say, what grounds, undergirds, overrides DF—not necessarily in all-embracing and ever-harmonizing mother-earthly ways as if she could even never shrug, but more cuttingly, precisely, rhythmically like the coolly warming hand of a nurse, a cook, a typist, even a Provost, that keeps everyone somehow rightly spaced—or just slightly spaced out—across the board ever so dexterously.

AF alters DF anchoringly by giving it "its birthmarks" which prefigures its dead mask. Meet Hélène Cixous' (virgin) mother, Eve "here (Eve y est)," as old as the Bible and the kitchen sink (*l'évier*):

The words are a gift. Written in the unforgettable language of life. Inscribed in a foreign tongue so foreign that it recalls the infinite intimacy of life, the mother gives the daughter a gift of writing which comes from the other: the other's life, the other life. And signs it, in life. And then the writer

countersigns it, otherwise, with her given name: "Hélène Cixous." [12]

"The infinite intimacy of life" is the subterranean space between a sign and a countersign kept tight, and tightly played out, by that another sign given away by an an-economy; the analogue economy of life-giving unfolds through and flows over the dialectical economy of the Trinity [13]. I live, and there in, I live on-or will have lived-by whatever last name that inhabits and inhibits me. Perhaps that, that other name, that "sur-name" [14] Khora, for instance, is what sustains and survives the mother-daughter company, un-Limited Inc. What matrix of sign-ifications yet to emerge! Such is, I should now say, "the self feminists must code" [15], as a cyborg mother machine already suggested almost a generation ago with a finger pointing back, inevitably, to a Descartes-in drag?

The Presence of this "Cartesian gene" in the plant,  
rooted precisely where the human lost to the machine,  
reveals the tenuous border between humanity,  
inanimate objects endowed with lifelike qualities,  
and living organisms that encode digital information. [16]

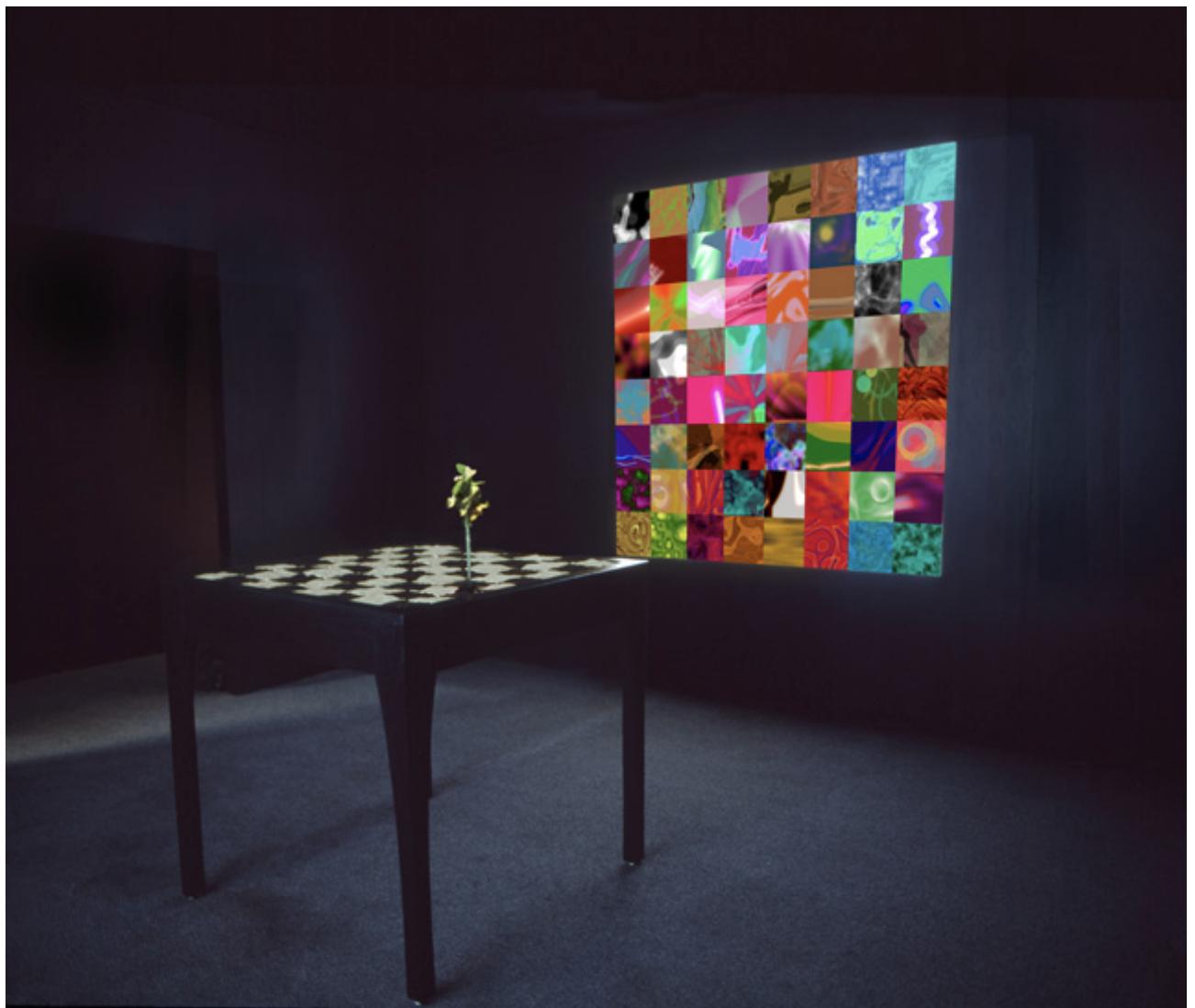


Fig. 2. *Move 36*, 2002/04 (detail), Eduardo Kac, transgenic work with artist-created plant and digital video, dimensions variable, edition of 3 © Collection Alfredo Hertzog da Silva, São Paulo.

## 2. Departing from databases, AF digs into the motherboard, menstrual languages of feminism.

Alert to analytic mistakes, categorical in particular, AF, often intent on making a point, is still rather unhesitant to draw on analogies, allegories, and anecdotes to suck you in, into its confabulatory fields of thought-action including identity-fabrication. Just to ease you into this mini-series of derivative pontifications here, I would like to read with you this quite extraordinary, opening passage by Kaja Silverman on *Flesh of My Flesh*:

Sometimes all that it takes to get the war machine up and running is a whiff of likeness. [...] We also relate to ourselves analogically. We do not have an "identity" because we are constantly changing, but we also do not break into a million pieces because each of our "shapes" resembles the others. [17]

Quite right, is it not? Also, associative pondering and plotting is, quite literally, a hallmark of analog(ical) feminists who would also, occasionally, mobilize Platonic parallels as the hermeneutic guardrail especially in consideration for those otherwise unable to get "there" or "it." Christian allegories, analogies, and parables that instruct while delighting the (non-)readers and (non-)believers, any particular scenes of which we need not detail here, are prime examples. Truth be told further, however, the use made of Platonic rationalism by AF is more eccentric than heuristic, a little unruly: it dwells not only on, but in the Platonic cave, where they are capable of lubricating themselves.

Somewhere there is a siren. [...] Sometimes she begins to sing. The women say that of her song nothing is to be heard but a continuous O. that is why this song evokes for them, like everything that recalls the O, the zero or the circle, the vulval ring. [18]

Ms. COgit0—if not or along with “Mr. Cogito” [19]—who reaches, and registers back, that 0/0-degree thinking via some queerly different routes and ruses, would navigate the world a little differently. Rather than charting the water and clearing the land by using “dryware” [20] along the way, (s)he becomes the “bloody” map itself, itself then set in motion, pluralized, intensified, with its multiple neurological complexities spectrally singularized. Is that not how Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, translates the universal modernity and modern absenteeism of *cogito, sum?* What am I then *becoming* or what have I *been*?—*The Second Sex*. What do I think I am?—I am the becoming-woman of an “I” that thinks (a thought (of a woman)); not who, but still a woman à la Aristotle, like his womb.

Note the irreducible embedded-ness of material inscriptions that transforms, by tactile animation, the very figures of thoughts, the “bloody” animal machine, the machine fed by that special nectar, blood, that allegedly only God can first give, which one passes on by second donation, generation after generation. It was, after all, such a figure of the biblically “creative” divinity that Descartes, at the end of the series of otherworldly meditations, sought to reinstall firmly and restore summarily, at least on paper; “Unnerved by his own heterogeneity, Descartes abandoned his claim to be the origin of his thoughts and restored God to that position.” [21] Silverman is spot-on there, on the radical internal discontinuities between ‘Descartes’ and Cartesian voices. That point at which such a Cartesian U-turn or chiasmus (X) is about to take place, that knotty co-origination of being and becoming is, as I envisage – as a little bit of a Cartesian addict myself, I will say that – precisely where analogue feminists dwell while thinking (through) their bloody, persistent, thoughts: they would have to be left wondering where such ‘God’ or ‘Being’ comes from or how She-He-or-It comes if at all. Such interstitially transitional, and transitorily inscriptive, moves that form and foster feminist undercurrents in philosophical traditions still dominated by economized

monolingualism, did and will continue to flip open and render visible various "processes of parallel emergence, non causal connections and simultaneous developments which suggest that sexual relations continually shift in sympathy with changes to the ways many other aspects of the world work. [...]" ; "and," as Sadie Plant goes on to note, "by the 1970s, when Luce Irigaray wrote *This Sex which is not One*, fluid complexities were giving a world which had once revolved around ones and others a dynamic which obsolesced the possibility of being one of anything at all" [22].

Quickly sketched so far, just as a starting point, is also an allegorical passion with which analog feminists including a certain less clear--gender-being/switching-Descartes in the background, would commit themselves to theoretical anachronism or even anachronistic rationalism, save itself, i.e., for the sake of its-self, to save itself from itself. Such is also how I savor the archaic materiality, surreality and futurity of the language of AF, including its richly choral, polyvalent linguisticity. Unafraid to bleed at least a little in order to survive itself, AF speaks the language of not just fluidity but more specifically menstruality, the gendered limits of abstraction. Such is also how Julie Kristeva on the cyclicalities of women's time and Gayatri Spivak on the temporal precision of subaltern women's silence, too, for instance, could be read together, alongside the work of Irigaray, without their analog singularities being digitally conflated or camouflaged.

How does the feminist blood flow? And how is it to be kept flowing? Constellations, not just computations, and not simply keywords, but keys to words that matter even beyond measure: molding theories out of stories of various scales and sorts, "embracing an infinity of great and small" [23], analog feminists would operate as the irreducible readers and invisible architects of the evident, who could mobilize their serial distractedness and interlingual imaginations, against the relentlessly binarized "informatics of domination" [24], the "scary new networks" [25] of significations in this post-industrial, global technocratic capitalism; if no longer "new," does it not remain increasingly invasive and pervasive? Feminist reading in the age of instant digitality and "real-time" virtuality should then aim to d@ive right back into data, almost immediately, again for its own sake, to "save and lose" itself at once. For "when a digital image disappears, it decays into the "dust" of numerical data. The data could of course be used to create a computationally identical image, but that image would still be new" [26], something new in all things that were not. AF names and sustains such creative practices of anachronistic reading, multi-mediated and platformed assemblages of critically self-reflexive practices that fold themselves into and out of the very legacy of critical reading.

Through the looking-glass, and what AF found there:  
A panorama of silhouette, cutting cries from the past:



Fig. 3. *Slavery! Slavery!*, 1997, Cut paper on wall, 11 x 85 feet, Courtesy of the artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

### 3. The mother of inventions being the mother, the daughter needs to invent still, if only otherwise.

Cut from the mother, the daughter, like her mother, does and must and will “lose her mother” [27] who becomes “collage (that) precisely references the spaces in between and refuses to respect the boundaries that usually delineate self from other, art object from museum, and the copy from the original” [28]. Referential refusal at work, figures arise still, dancingly, to knotty scenes of encounter. Here’s a pair of cutting ironies, an unsettling duet of irreverence, not to be confused with irrelevance: lose your mother, and the mother will not be lost; use your mother, and the mother will not be used:

Using art as bait and deploying the female body in particular as a site for the negative projection of racial and colonial fantasy is simply a modern technology. But using the same technology to turn racism and sexism back upon themselves like a funhouse mirror is a part of what I am calling feminist negation. [29]

“Shadow feminisms,” vividly illustrated by those stirring surfaces of Kara Walker’s cutouts, and provocatively advanced by Judith Jack Halberstam, to both of which AF is chorally connectible, “take the form not of becoming, being, and doing but of shady, murky modes of undoing, unbecoming, and violating” [30]. Willingly non-normative, non-conforming and non-assimilated, these otherwise mobilized political gestures and negative identities are invaluable illuminating in the present context, too, of a “contrarian” search for digitalized analog feminism. For the kind of digitally-infrastructured, analog-infrared feminism being conceived here still relies on a certain silhouette of the thinker-reader uncannily coded and cast in post-Cartesian phenomenological idioms of alterities of selfhood: how deep is—can be—a flat refusal of the now, not then or later, and indeed the repetition of such “inappropriate” countermoves? Or how extensive is our, my, anyone’s complicity with the reflexive formation of feminist discourses? The

question is: what is not to be repeated when a repetition does and must and will take place, given this “de-propriating force of repetition that is the ground of possibility of meaning?” [31] To ask the same à la Betty-Friedan-look-alike appearing back at the beginning and in the future, which triggered this doughnut-thought around AF in the first place: what should be scrutinized, when feminists do and must and will also focus elsewhere? By “unnestling” the inaugural spirit of shadow feminisms from the usual “Anglo-American” language of ideologized positivism, political sociality and utopian hyper-modernity, what Halberstam aims to do is to contribute to discontinuing—not uploading or downloading—that line of doing, thinking, acting, being ... you name it, you see it, when you sense it. Halberstam’s move is to discredit the departmentalized, “racialized and sexualized,” “ugly legacy of Oedipal models of generationality” that institutional feminism has inherited while purportedly questioning it; true and fair enough, if “the whole model of “passing down” knowledge from mother to daughter is quite clearly invested in white, gendered, and heteronormativity,” [32] the next move would be to figure out how to depart from there. Again, that tough question, almost like a stain, of “the informatics of domination” returns, resurfaces, the issue being how, where and when to “delete” it; whether it is possible to cut it, to cut it not just down or up but away, completely away.

Up and down, left and right ... cut and paste, here and there, the head of this analog feminist still feels like some scrambled eggs, for she still needs to slice—if not exactly cut—her way through some elective affinities she senses towards the ethico-political orientation of “shadow feminisms” among others, as noted in passing. Why, and whither, this almost absolutized—digitally re-mastered?—black-or-white dissociation and disavowal? Why not allow those heavily mythopoeticized and overcoded mothers to reemerge in some trans-categorical or trans-paradigmatic ways?—in translations, for instance, of that hardly guardable, foreign “mother” tongue, in and of which Elissa Marder, for instance, speaks with exemplarity complexity and fluency without fetishizing or abjecting it but rather just animating it [33]; note how she has the reproductive logic of the mother machine materialize through various figures of the mother she digs into or through. What about, that is to ask, the musical singularity of maternal gifts and idioms of feminist discourses? Shadow feminists can play, too, or can’t they? A shadow play, perhaps: a kind that is “much more than a kind of willful play for power within the discursive field loosely called ‘theory’?” [34] Or is the constitutive deconstructiveness, objective transitoriness, of it all too gray, all too humanly gray? *Homo Ludens* on the move remains a gray matter, with or without a feminist hat on it.

... to be continued @ [www.analogfeminism.net](http://www.analogfeminism.net)

## Endnotes

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